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Northernness, Sheffield and the 1966 World Cup: The “Steel City” on Display

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ABSTRACT

During summer 1966 global attention turned to the manufacturing centre of Sheffield as “Steel City” played host to a number of FIFA World Cup matches. The tournament has been romanticised by the press as a key national triumph following England’s victory, whilst sport historians have critiqued the event’s cultural, economic, political and social impact. This article contends that this major sporting event served as a platform for articulating and experiencing the provincial north of England by highlighting how post-war Sheffield utilised the 1966 World Cup to promote multiple identities spanning that of a traditional, northern industrial centre to one of a modern, forward-thinking city.

KEYWORDS

England 1966; FIFA World Cup; northern identity; northernness; Sheffield; Steel City; urban renewal; Yorkshire

Every four years the FIFA World Cup brings with it varying levels of pandemonium across England as the men’s football team’s prospects of success are mulled over by millions of supporters, the national press and expert analysts. From Sheffield to Surbiton, the craze brings widespread articulations of hope and more commonly despair as much of the nation is swept up in a football frenzy as the “Three Lions” ultimately fail to emulate England’s sole FIFA World Cup triumph of July 1966. That tournament has become iconic not just in English sporting history but national identity and has culminated in received memory amongst those even too young to remember the match and Bobby Charlton holding the Jules Rimet Trophy aloft at Wembley.¹ As each notable anniversary occurs or England flirt dangerously with the prospect of emulating the success of Charlton, Stiles et al., 1966 is readily revisited. This was most apparent during the European Championships of 1996 (Euro 96) in England which combined the 30th anniversary with a semi-final defeat by Germany with a flood of “great nostalgia for 1966”, bringing to the media gaze oft recycled archival footage, interviews with the winning team and even the story of Pickles the dog’s recovery of the stolen Jules Rimet Trophy in 1966.²

In his June 2006 *History Today* editorial – an edition complete with a feature on the infamous theft – Furtado contended that difficulties are presented when “moments in the past are so embedded in popular consciousness that it seems impossible that there could be anything new to say about them”.³ Yet, by looking beyond the more familiar narratives associated with 1966 such as faint memories of watching the match on television, there

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is much more to be discovered that reveals much about Britain of the 1960s.⁴ Given the event's central role in popular culture, it is perhaps surprising that despite a plethora of popular work, there is a relative scarcity of academic work on the 1966 World Cup in England. The academic work that has emerged has addressed a diverse range of topics including politics, diplomatic relations, national identity, commerce, provincial experience, gendered experience, folklore and memories of the tournament. The wider political implications of the 1966 World Cup have been the subject of work by Polley who has revealed the challenges posed to the British government by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's qualification for the tournament, including potential exclusion of the team that would have prevented their inaugural World Cup Finals appearance and with it one of the greatest World Cup shocks of all time.⁵ More recently, the government's role has also been subject to scrutiny by Gillett and Tennent who have explored in impressive detail the initial, limited government financial backing for the tournament and subsequent issues of hosting the World Cup in 1966 including infrastructure problems and challenges of provincial participation.⁶ In doing so their study has cast new light on national implications of hosting the tournament, but also contributed significantly to understanding the experience of host towns and cities beyond London by mining a rich range of provincial sources including newspaper archives, official programmes, football club archives, transport records and council minutes.⁷ Gibbons' examination of contrasting representations of Englishness across World Cup finals similarly returned to contemporary newspapers to unearth the multifaceted and often blurred boundaries of supposed expressions of English national identity across several tournaments.⁸ Dauncey and Hare too have advocated the value of returning to newspaper sources as a mechanism for accessing "history from below" and gauging fan experience and national and local engagement, pointing to Herzog's study of West Germany's unlikely 1954 World Cup victory that drew upon local press reports of the time to explore public responses to "the miracle of Bern".⁹

The 50th anniversary of the tournament in England also generated other timely profiles of the tournament from gendered, national and regional perspectives. Pope's study of female fan experience and interpretations of the 1966 World Cup alongside the Munich Air Disaster and the rise of footballers as sexualised national celebrities has highlighted how the tournament provided the first memory of the sport for many women respondents, whilst also revealing the engagement of a number of women during the tournament was limited owing to traditional gender roles.¹⁰ Hughson's cultural history of the tournament has placed the tournament against a backdrop of 1960s popular culture, masculinity, sporting advances and subsequent memories and mythology associated with England's victory.¹¹ Popular responses have also emerged including a number of initiatives undertaken to mark the anniversary of World Cup fortnight in "Steel City". The local media including BBC Sheffield revisited the city's role in hosting matches at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough Stadium by encouraging listeners to share their memories of the tournament, whilst local newspapers reminisced about 1966 with *The Star* supporting the "Football's Coming Home" exhibition at Sheffield's Moor Market.¹² Sheffield Local Studies Library also produced a small exhibition to mark the 50th anniversary of group games and a quarter final at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough Stadium, drawing upon local organisation records, photographs and newspaper reports, whilst Sheffield City Libraries also held public events in partnership with the Sporting Memories

Network as part of the #memoriesof66 project.¹³ This article seeks to draw upon some of these methodologies by returning to documents generated during the period to gain an insight into the experience in Sheffield during the 1966 World Cup. In particular the article embraces a return to the documents generated by the various stakeholders in the interests of avoiding ahistoricism, gaining a better insight into the economic and social environment in which the World Cup occurred as well as turning to the column inches of the local press to gain a sense of contemporary opinion in the media.¹⁴ By adopting this approach, this article adds to existing work that seeks to expose and understand the apparatus and agents responsible for articulating, promoting and shaping northernness.¹⁵ Moreover, by focusing on a specific northern manufacturing city at a time of change amidst post-war renewal during a short-term, high profile sporting event, it is hoped that the article sheds new light on the place of traditional notions of northernness at a time when a changing Sheffield was in the international spotlight.

This article begins by setting the scene with an overview of Sheffield as the archetypal northern manufacturing city seeking to ensure its continued presence amongst the major industrial centres in the country. The important role of steel in the city's identity is then outlined followed by profiling of new, modernist developments in the post-war city following significant damage during the Second World War. Attention then turns to the organisation of the tournament and the various agents and strands of activity involved in preparing the city for World Cup fortnight spanning business organisations, the city council's role, cultural and entertainment institutions and infrastructure. Responses to Sheffield's attempts at place promotion – spanning traditional industrial portrayals as well as more modern inceptions resulting from urban renewal – are analysed, before legacies of the tournament in terms of economic benefit, infrastructure, northern identity and sense of place are considered.

Post-war Sheffield

In the spirit of 1950s and 1960s post-war urban renewal which had provided the industrial north with a short-term boost, Sheffield was keen to draw upon the potential offered by the tournament to promote the potential and progress of the area.¹⁶ Sheffield was keen to move away from perceptions of a city that “could justly claim to be called the ugliest town in the old world” as Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, republished in 1963, would have it and no longer “a dark picture in a golden frame”.¹⁷ A decade before the first World Cup match at Hillsborough, the Sheffield City Council produced handbook reflected post-war Sheffield's aspirations for profiling industry, leisure, lovely suburbs, education, research and the arts, a modern “city of contrasts” combining “the smoky centre and the immediate outskirts which is bound to strike every visitor”.¹⁸

The “smoky centre” described in the 1956 Sheffield City Council produced guide to “Steel City” reflected the relative prosperity enjoyed in the early decades of the post-war period, with full employment consistent throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with the majority of the work force, still engaged in manufacturing (57.5%) and the heavy and light trades (44.4%).¹⁹ In 1957 some 650 of the nation's 700 cutlery firms were based in Sheffield with Richards employing over 500 workers in the 1950s and the largest firm, Viners, boasting 800 employees in 1965.²⁰ The 1950s saw periods of full production in the steel industry, adoption of new technology, and a significant rise in profits at



United Steel, English Steel Corporation and Firth Brown's.²¹ Yet the 1960s saw Sheffield face heightened economic challenges from abroad in its staple industries, with Bernard Cotton, chairman of the Osborn steel group, aligning the decade with the end of "the Victorian era in Sheffield steel".²² Amidst efforts to secure the industry's future, approximately £150 million post-war investment in modernisation of steel in the Sheffield district saw old plant replaced with new, technically advanced production methods, which also resulted in changes to the South Yorkshire skyline, Tweedale noting:

The new Templeborough Electric Melting Shop replaced twenty-one open-hearth furnaces (fourteen of which has been housed in the quarter-mile-long old Templeborough shop – the longest open-hearth shop in Europe) and destroyed one of the landmarks in the district – fourteen huge chimneys along the Sheffield Road. In their place went the world's largest electric steelmaking unit of six 110-ton electric arc furnaces ... closer to Sheffield, by 1963 the ESC [English Steel Corporation] had opened its new £26 million Tinsley Park works.²³

With the World Cup matches at Hillsborough on the horizon, there were challenges to the city's industrial might, with the *Daily Mail* in April 1966 reporting on the English Steel Corporation's plans to close four melting furnaces, amidst a decline in the demand for steel during the ensuing six months bringing with it a downturn in atmosphere in the industry.²⁴ Thus, the World Cup's arrival in South Yorkshire found a Sheffield still very much defined by its Victorian industries yet facing challenges to its recent boom and the tournament provided an important opportunity to promote its status as "Steel City". The cutlery industry too faced a struggle to maintain its monopoly amidst challenges from the Far East and cheap imports which would ultimately prove the death knell for a number of major firms in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵

Just as the World Cup provided an opportunity to showcase legacies of the city's Victorian industrial might, there too was an eagerness amongst businesses and the local authority to highlight Sheffield as embracing the post-war urban developments and modernity in evidence in Britain's war damaged cities. The city centre was redesigned, bringing with it the establishment of new department stores, a state-of-the-art College of Technology and leisure provision, cleaning of smoke blackened buildings including the Town Hall, clearance of slums and the establishment of new housing on the periphery.²⁶ Sheffield in 1966 provided the visitor with a city proud of its industry, embracing modernity yet one that had "lost much of its individuality as its old buildings were torn down and new ones rose in styles that could be found all over Britain".²⁷ Of the new structures to adorn the South Yorkshire skyline, the most acclaimed and controversial was the Le Corbusier-esque Park Hill housing developments, bringing "streets in the sky" which attracted world-wide attention and provided "a dramatic contribution to the townscape".²⁸ The city could also look back on a relatively successful season for Sheffield Wednesday, defeated FA Cup finalists, with the club looking to push on amongst the elite of British football.

Planning the Tournament

Sheffield was named as one of the possible venues to host the World Cup at an August 1960 meeting in Rome as England was selected ahead of Germany as the host nation.²⁹ The selection of Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough ground as a host venue was confirmed in 1963 alongside Wembley (London), Highbury (London), Old Trafford (Manchester), Villa Park (Birmingham), Goodison Park (Liverpool), St James' Park (Newcastle) and



Roker Park (Sunderland).³⁰ Despite its South Yorkshire location, due to the arrangement of the group stages and regional pairing arrangements, matches at Hillsborough would take place as part of the Midlands group alongside Villa Park.³¹ The January 1966 draw for the World Cup matches would see South Yorkshire play host to the “charming Swiss, the strong-running Germans, the fiery Spaniards and the excitable Argentinians”, a combination which brought Sheffield Wednesday general manager and secretary Eric Taylor to declare “Sheffield has come out of it quite well. We have not got the cream but we have not got the rabbits either”.³² One *Morning Telegraph* article summed up mixed emotions to the draw with the headline “Hotels are happy, fans not so sure”, with the Chamber of Trade’s Press Officer A.G. Priestley also declaring “there will be some sadness about not seeing Brazil play in Sheffield but this draw has a brighter side. We must make sure Sheffield shows the Europeans the kind of hospitality that will make them want to come back”.³³ Letters promising a special welcome to Sheffield, where there was “plenty to see in and around the city”, followed from the Lord Mayor to the presidents of the Argentine, Spanish, Swiss, West German Football Associations.³⁴ A more curious plan to provide a “Yorkshire welcome” was that proposed by Joe Scott, owner of an entertainment company in the city, for “sophisticated, intelligent, good-looking” hostesses who would help counter “very, very dull” Sheffield.³⁵ The sense of opportunity afforded by the World Cup for promoting positive perceptions of the northern manufacturing districts and providing an opportunity to gain some deserved attention was echoed elsewhere. In his seminal study of northern England and the national imagination, Russell has pointed to how the World Cup provided a platform for articulating, and countering, northern antipathies at southern dominance of major footballing events in steel producing Middlesbrough:

Many of these tensions and attitudes surfaced during the 1966 World Cup when other major grounds enjoyed the opportunity to show their qualities and those of their fans ... The Mayor of Middlesbrough, whose Ayresome Park was a World Cup venue, made the revealing remark that local people “now feel that they are part of the country” as a result of the town’s inclusion in the event.³⁶

Yet such confidence in what the northern industrial city had to offer was far from universal with concerns at Sheffield’s readiness even before the draw had been made. Although the local press were confident in the footballing arrangements that would cast the city into the international spotlight, with the newly renovated Hillsborough hailed as the “Wembley of the North” and well versed in hosting international football, less faith was shown in the municipality’s abilities to handle proceedings.³⁷ The *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* expressed concern that there was a “very real problem ... in the arrangement and implementation of the effort made on the non-football side”, laying responsibility firmly at the city council’s door who had done little when compared to the efforts of local companies, individuals and organisations.³⁸ The Lord Mayor’s letters also provoked a response from journalist Bryan Dunthorne, who questioned the City Council’s limited activity in preparing any “Come to Sheffield” campaign as “the most important event in the history of Sheffield as a sports centre” fast approached.³⁹ The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph’s* Michael Crouch offered a similarly pessimistic view, with the headline “A warm welcome to our World Cup visitors ... We have little else to offer them” and city’s plans “hampered by disappointment after disappointment” including the lack of beer garden provision and little visible evidence of the £17,000 invested in the tournament.⁴⁰



Wider public concerns were also in evidence in the columns of the local press with one “Letter to the Editor” from Manchester Road resident Jean Harris showcasing anxieties about promoting Sheffield:

It is without doubt painful for a native of Sheffield to be honest about his home town. We all love the particular plot from which we sprang, and are familiar with the old streets and haunts, but alas for these very reasons, we are rendered blind to the milieu of our existence. Only those who have never visited any other place with observance can be proud, or at least satisfied with Sheffield ... Are we Sheffielders either too stupid or too self-conscious to do anything with finesse? Must all of us be rough and ready, and yet not a few be able to rise to an occasion? ... The village mentality still prevails and blights our obvious potential.⁴¹

Listing the Art Galleries alongside Town, City and Cutlers Halls as “all we have to offset Sheffield’s predominant feature of interminable streets of neglected property”, solace was found in the “varied character of countryside” which surrounded the city.⁴²

Despite recognising that “Sheffield, to say the least, by the nature of its industries has hardly been looked upon as a mecca for tourists”, an article by Sheffield Wednesday’s General Manager and Secretary Eric Taylor in *FA News* recognised the potential the World Cup offered for the “city with a changing face” in altering the lack of tourism “for a hectic and welcome week or two”.⁴³ In tackling its reputation as a “dour Yorkshire area producing the world’s best steel and little else ... of more smoke than sun, more grime than green belt”, Sheffield with its new buildings, smokeless zones, confidence that “when Yorkshire folk set their stall to do a thing, they do it well” and enhancements at Hillsborough all made for an event with strong potential for boosterism and prestige.⁴⁴

The national press turned attention to preparations in “The North” in the days following the draw, with *The Guardian* surveying each of the host cities and towns, reporting limited progress but a “great deal of enthusiasm” in Sheffield and a “varied programme, including Britain’s first industrial eisteddfod” in Middlesbrough – labelled with nearby Sunderland as “bleak, workaday industrial towns”.⁴⁵ Yet, in comparison to other host cities, the Teesside town’s preparations were praised, with one Sheffield newspaper comparing the South Yorkshire city’s efforts unfavourably with Middlesbrough where the local corporation’s £10,000 commitment exceeded other centres’ investment per head of population and helped towards “an unrivalled string of events”.⁴⁶

Yorkshire and Sheffield Hospitality

As Sheffield prepared to play host to the largest global football event on the planet, there were concerted efforts to ensure that those visiting the World Cup were well aware that they had arrived in Yorkshire. In the early months of 1966, one newspaper article with the headline “A touch of Yorkshire”, reported Sheffield Labour Councillor Joe Ashton’s calls for foreign visitors during World Cup fortnight to be “given traditional Yorkshire enjoyments, taken to a workingmen’s club, bingo sessions conducted in French, or taken round a funfair”.⁴⁷ Yet, there appeared to be little universal agreement on the Sheffield or Yorkshire that should be presented to the city’s visitors, with the eventual programme of activity delivering a combine of the traditional fare that Ashton had called for alongside attempts to promote a modern, vibrant, forward-thinking city embracing the international cultural and social opportunities the World Cup presented. Embracing a cosmopolitan, European approach however brought difficulties with particular problems



surrounding licensing doing little to help Sheffield's "tawdry" reputation for entertainment, with one June 1966 *Sheffield Morning Telegraph* article declaring the lack of a World Cup beer garden due to licensing disputes as "shattering the last vestiges of a brighter image".⁴⁸ The failure to deliver on a successful nightclub for the tournament too did little to assist any cosmopolitan feel in South Yorkshire and led to further criticism in the local press. Despite such setbacks, around 200 separate functions were planned for World Cup fortnight and *The Star* recognised the potential an array of activities including folk music, exhibitions, tours, dancers and displays, brought in showcasing a swinging "Steel City", declaring "it may not yet be La Vie Parisienne but it will be Sheffield in a mood to have the *New York Times* telling the world that the notorious swing has spread from London".⁴⁹ As well as more international entertainments including Hungarian State Gypsy Ensemble, and an exhibition of the Seliman collection of oriental art, the offerings included a number of local relevance.⁵⁰ The newly renovated City Museum hosted an exhibition of sporting trophies, described by its director Geoffrey Lewis as "pertinent to Sheffield because of the trophy making industry here".⁵¹

There was also an eagerness to showcase the manufacturing heritage of the "Steel City" as local industries opened up to visits during the tournament, mimicking the northern tourism trends that saw "the larger forges and cutlery shops of Sheffield" featured alongside other industrial "Yorkshire attractions regularly listed in guidebooks up to 1900 and beyond" as visitors sought to discover the north.⁵² Alongside industrial promotion, the City Council too were keen to promote the city's steel manufacturing identity, selecting the "World Cup City – SHEFFIELD – City of Steel" postal slogan ahead of a range of eight other options including "Sheffield Welcomes World Cup Visitors" and "World Cup Competition 1966 Sheffield England", underlining the importance of Sheffield's steel manufacturing identity and appearing on approximately 10 million letters.⁵³

Alongside opportunities to celebrate and explore Sheffield's steel connections, the World Cup also afforded opportunities for visitors to explore some of the modern developments in Sheffield, including the "ultra-modern" Castle Market and daily tours of Park Hill-Hyde Park flats, dubbed "the greatest single development of its kind in Western Europe" boasting an "international reputation among architects and planners" (Figure 1).⁵⁴ For those looking to escape the modern, manufacturing city, the proximity of "some of the most beautiful country in England" and "great houses" were promoted in a return to notions of the "golden frame".⁵⁵

Whilst the Sheffield attractions and those of other northern hosts had brought cynicism in the national press, a number of more positive articles appeared in local business association magazines and trade journals, whilst souvenir handbooks and visitor guides were produced by commercial and municipal bodies to promote Sheffield and the interests of their own organisations. The publications of the city's business associations also served an important role in promoting Sheffield to the business world. The July 1966 edition of *Service in Sheffield*, the district's Chamber of Trade journal, provided extensive detail of efforts to "impress visitors with a new garden city look", whilst detailing renovation of Sheaf Square, flagpoles around the city, information centres, interpreter facilities, "the city's biggest-ever programme of entertainment" and issuing World Cup fortnight window posters welcoming visitors in four languages.⁵⁶ Sheffield City Council utilised official World Cup visitor booklets and guides for the purposes of place promotion, albeit prompting some reservation in the local press of the city's offerings.⁵⁷ Many aspects of



Figure 1. Park Hill and World Cup flags, 1966. Source: Photograph reproduced with the permission of Johnson Press South Yorkshire.

traditional, industrial Sheffield were in evidence alongside an apparent eagerness to point to new developments in a modern city, with one official handbook's introduction declaring:

Sheffield is proud to be one of the great industrial centres of Europe. It is equally proud to have dispelled the legend that it is smoky and grime-laden. Visitors will be able to judge the truth of this for themselves when they have seen the magnificent new buildings which now increasingly enhance the City Centre and its near approaches, its vast parks and open spaces, its facilities for shopping, sport and entertainment and its beautiful suburbs.⁵⁸

Beyond promotional literature, the city's business associations played an important role in showcasing industry and progress in Sheffield. The Junior Chamber of Commerce organised "an exhibition of cutlery, tableware and silverware, aimed at catching the eye of World Cup visitors" in the Cutlers' Hall, which also housed the special World Cup visitors' lounge, with only manufacturers from the Sheffield areas permitted to exhibit their wares.⁵⁹ Similarly, the Sheffield Rotary Club mobilised to plan their "biggest-ever" goodwill operation including arranging tours of local works, producing booklets of the city's industries, setting up a visitor base at the Cutlers' Hall and establishing a special committee to cater for visiting businessmen "to make sure the visitors enjoy themselves socially and get to know about the workings of Sheffield industry".⁶⁰ The finale of this showcase of Sheffield's cutlery history came in the form of the final social event of the city's World Cup fortnight as the city's Master Cutler, Sir Eric Mensforth, hosted a gathering of overseas journalists at the Hall with a "tremendous amount of goodwill for Sheffield" on show.⁶¹ There was some more curious mechanisms deployed for promoting the northern city's



industrial identity, including plans for the “Made in Sheffield” exhibition of Sheffield products at the Cutlers’ Hall to include taped factory noise to add realism, whilst the BBC recorded “the lusty voices of Sheffield steelworkers in full voice” and the sound of Sheffield steel being made for use in a series of 10 programmes on the World Cup host centres for overseas broadcast.⁶² Such romanticised, celebratory depictions of the manufacturing city echoed media representations of other northern hosts that bore “an element of contestation over the city’s image that was portrayed as contingent on outsiders” inaccurate perceptions as opposed to the more optimistic “reality” that readers were invited to take pride in and identify with.⁶³

As the business of the football matches approached, the preparations for the World Cup across England received further national media attention, in doing so choosing to profile the very northern offerings at the disposal of visitors to the North East and Yorkshire. The day before the tournament’s first match, *The Observer’s* “Hardly the ticket for World Cup fans” article combined notions of British and local identity in predicting “as a national prestige booster – it [the World Cup tournament] is going to be a resounding flop”:

IN THE West End they have been cleaning up the clip joints; in Sheffield they are laying on nice tours round the steel works; and in Sunderland there are guided visits to coalmines. In other words, it is World Cup time in Britain – and Britain is about to provide a typically British welcome ... in the six provinces where World Cup matches will be held there are activities ranging from brass bands to folk-dancing, from the excitement of a World Cup concert by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to drinking until 11.30 p.m. in the pubs of Sheffield.⁶⁴

Conclusion: Mixed Success and Legacies

Ultimately, the football matches at Hillsborough would bring mixed success as a sporting showcase and opportunity to showcase Sheffield. Local press reports following the first game held at Hillsborough exclaimed the tournament provided “a ticket to Europe for Sheffield” in expanding identities beyond a typical Yorkshire industrial city or British manufacturing centre:

Perhaps for the first time in the history of Sheffield, the city completely lost its parochialism last night. Going to the World Cup match and witnessing the fantastic street scenes afterwards was like taking a ticket to Europe for the evening ... many of the banners were those of towns which proclaimed greetings to England and Sheffield. “Fritzlar greets Sheffield” proclaimed one German banner ... For the Sheffielders in the crowd it was an evening of great entertainment. And some of the Wednesday fans even started an Owls chant so as not to be outdone.⁶⁵

As for the wider implications for the city’s identity and memory, the article triumphantly declared:

It was a night for Sheffield to remember. It was the night Sheffield came alive. It was the night Sheffield went into Europe. It was the night Sheffield became Europe. And in the memories of many Swiss and Germans, the name of Sheffield will always have many happy associations.⁶⁶

The local support rallied behind underdogs Switzerland as they looked for the Swiss to be “to Sheffield what North Korea are to Middlesbrough” with the majority of the crowd supporting the underdogs in each of their “home” games at Hillsborough.⁶⁷ The games at Sheffield, however, lacked the excitement of unlikely triumphs such as the famous North Korea defeat of Italy in Middlesbrough, as the other matches at Hillsborough



Figure 2. Action from the Argentina vs. Switzerland, 16 July 1966. Source: Photograph reproduced with the permission of Johnson Press South Yorkshire.

resulted in the “home” Swiss team completing the tournament without a single point following defeats by Spain and Argentina (Figure 2). The final match to take place in Sheffield brought the clash of two former World Champions, Uruguay and West Germany, with the Germans triumphing 5–0 in a bad tempered affair described as an “afternoon of ripe melodrama” which saw two Uruguayan players dismissed and the team’s ill-discipline roundly criticised in the press.⁶⁸

With Hillsborough and Sheffield’s role in hosting the tournament complete, attention focused on the progress of the England national team, ultimately culminating in a 4–2 victory over West Germany in a famous Wembley final victory, courtesy of a hat-trick by Geoff Hurst and a Martin Peters goal after trailing 1–0. In his study of national identity and the 1966 World Cup, Mason argues the England national team’s triumph had “a positive impact on national morale” by providing “a temporary distraction from economic problems and a happy memory in worsening times”.⁶⁹

In terms of legacies for the provincial centres including Sheffield, Gillett and Tennent have pointed to short term benefits of hosting the tournament but placed greater emphasis on “the failure of the tournament to encourage tourism away from London”, resulting in limited economic benefit and legacies beyond the capital despite the football having attracted significant numbers to the north.⁷⁰ Attendance statistics for the matches held in the “North” reflected at least some success in bringing fans to the region, albeit often for the matches only. Following the semi-final between West Germany and Russia at Everton’s Goodison Park, an article from *The Guardian* reported on the cup games in the north



having brought over 600,000 through the turnstiles, with Goodison Park boasting the highest total attendance in the north at 235,695, whilst Sheffield drew “the second highest Northern total of 140,134” despite the article noting that “the matches at this ground were in the Midlands group”.⁷¹ The South Yorkshire press reflected positively on the tournament’s impact on fans, whilst praising the positive role played by Sheffield in hosting the tournament. In his “The cup of memories that will last for many years” article, journalist Colin Brannigan drew comparisons between the Wembley Final and Sheffield Wednesday’s epic FA Cup Final defeat a couple of months previous in declaring “the crowds have gone, but the memories will remain for many years to come”.⁷² Another article reported the case of a German doctor describing hospitality in Sheffield as “unique” and cited Swiss Sports Editor of *Tribune de Lausanne* Valentin Borghini’s praise of the local population who “for among all the people I have met during my life I have never seen any who are so naturally kind and willing to help as the inhabitants of Sheffield”.⁷³ Other foreign visitors considered Sheffield “a typically English town and that the people were warm, friendly and that nothing was too much trouble for them”, whilst drawing comparisons with industrial towns along the Ruhr.⁷⁴ There were mixed reviews reported on the entertainment on offer and the cleanliness of the city, whilst praise was forthcoming for Sheffield’s new high rise residence and the blending between old and new buildings.⁷⁵ The latter element is particularly relevant given the City Council’s World Cup handbook declaration that the tournament would afford an opportunity for the “magnificent new buildings” to help support positive place promotion of a regenerated Sheffield, views later echoed in Gibbon’s 1969 *Yorkshire: Britain’s Biggest County* guidebook in discovering a “picture now worthy of the frame”.⁷⁶

Just as Sheldon has emphasised the success of the World Cup in changing cynical perceptions of Liverpool albeit with few commercial gains, Sheffield too emerged from the tournament with a renewed confidence and pride.⁷⁷ The August 1966 edition of *Service in Sheffield* included a special “World Cup fortnight – A Truly Proud Sheffield” feature including photographs of the flagpoles and garden spaces installed for the tournament and reflected both upon limited economic benefit for local traders but the important function in putting a “new Sheffield” on the map:

Sheffield traders did not reap, in terms of cash, the rich harvest that the World Cup fortnight in Sheffield promised ... But for most it was an investment in sharing in the projection of Sheffield as a proud, progressive and enterprising city. Dividends in this sense were truly handsome. Not only the rest of Britain but many parts of the world learned through the Press, radio and television of a new Sheffield – a busy, prosperous, industrial city replanned into a garden city that could more than hold its own for beauty and civic achievement with anywhere else in the country ... This was impressively Sheffield on its mettle.⁷⁸

The editorial of the Sheffield Junior Chamber of Commerce’s *The Hub* publication diagnosed Sheffield “a Victim of World Cup fever, a disease beneficial to everyone whether football fan or not”, yet emphasised the need for the public to ensure that Sheffield did not “sink back into its normal condition of semi-coma”.⁷⁹

As the Sheffield City Council reflected upon the immediate legacies of World Cup fortnight, City Treasurer F.G. Jones felt Sheffield had got good value for money, reported the event was under budget (approximately £14,000 compared to £17,000), and declared “the atmosphere that was created, the good will that was engendered, and the publicity which Sheffield got as a result the expenditure was well worth while”.⁸⁰ The records of the



organising World Cup Sub-Committee provide a useful insight into the relative successes and failures of components of World Cup fortnight and shed some light on what proved popular in promoting “Steel City”. In September 1966 World Cup Liaison Officer and Librarian John Bebbington reported on responses by the various organisations engaged in entertaining visitors and Sheffielders, spanning reactions that “ranged from completely negative to highly satisfactory”.⁸¹ Events organised by the Corporation Departments seemingly had limited appeal to foreign visitors excepting the Abbeydale Works site with 800 of the 8523 visitors coming from overseas, compared with the popular Exhibition of Civic Plate, attended by 13,350 people, attracting “relatively few foreign visitors” and “none from overseas being noted” amongst the 155 Park Hill tour attendees.⁸² The Junior Chamber of Commerce’s “Made in Sheffield” did however prove successful in showcasing the “Steel City” wares to an international audience, with 25% of its 5000 visitors hailing from overseas, whilst the Stainless Steel Development Association’s “Stainless Steel Fortnight” was hailed as a “great success” with a number of visitors from overseas. The industrial visit statistics did little to dismiss the cynicism of the press, with 22 of the 47 firms that permitted special visits recording no uptake, whilst no direct business was recorded as having developed from the initiative.⁸³ As Gillett and Tennent have argued, the experience of Sheffield’s factories reflected wider patterns across the provincial host towns and cities, with tours organised to “exhibit Britain’s industrial wealth” attracting disappointing numbers and creating even less leads that might have led to international trade.⁸⁴

Thus, Sheffield’s World Cup experience brought mixed fortunes from the perspective of long-term economic impact, a trend consistent with other provincial towns and cities. Yet, World Cup fortnight in Sheffield undoubtedly succeeded in creating positive perceptions of the “Steel City” as a result of articulating traditional, industrial northernness that brought praise from visitors to the city, the business community and Sheffielders alike. Moreover, the important role of local and regional identity during the World Cup and positive responses to the “Steel City” illustrate the enduring ability of traditional northernness to exist alongside modern developments in the city and the value placed on local and regional identity whilst Sheffield was the subject of national and international focus. Further research to establish the extent to which northernness was evident and the result of a concerted effort in the other provincial northern towns and cities is necessary before the 1966 World Cup Finals can be considered to have played a pivotal role in articulating and exposing northernness to new audiences and shaping cultural legacies centred around unique encountering of the north. Yet, the initial indications from Sheffield’s experience during World Cup fortnight suggest that the tournament is a useful platform for understanding mechanisms, methods and responses to articulations of northernness across multiple public, private and voluntary organisations.

Notes

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